

The young and the old in living Christianity

The young and the old: Saved by faith

Dear listener, whether you are young or old, whether you are from the generation that has already seen their own grandchildren, or if you are from the current generation of children - you can believe all your sins forgiven in the name and blood of Jesus. This is the same gospel that has been preached from generation to generation. "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us unto the kingdom of his dear Son; In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." (Col. 1: 11-14) And from the old testament, "Both young men, and maidens; old men and children: let them praise the name of the Lord: for his name alone is excellent: his glory is above the earth and heaven." (Ps. 148: 12,13) Dear young ones, "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." (1 Tim. 4:12) And to you, dear older ones, "ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. (Eph. 6:4) Remember, young and old; "ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

Believers of all ages are citizens of God's Kingdom. We are all joined in the same spirit and love. "There is one body, and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." (Eph. 4:4-6) Also, "So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." (Rom. 12:5)

God's Holy Word teaches us that the hope of salvation is through faith, "for therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, the just shall live by faith." (Rom. 1:17) The work of God's kingdom is the preaching of the forgiveness of sins in the name and blood of Jesus; this work is done by his children. "Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained" (John 20:21-23).

Gospel work is done by all believers in the unity of faith, whether young or old. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, here seems to be speaking specifically about the calling of the Gentiles, but his words also seem to embody the unity of believers which knows no boundaries based on ethnicity, geography or politics, gender, or age; "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith

cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom 10:12-17). Consistent with the spirit of this message we also say that there no difference in God's kingdom between the young and old, "for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him" (v 12).

The Lord Jesus himself promised not to leave His people without comfort and correct teaching, and said; "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26). Therefore, living faith and Christian doctrine, as well as the decisions made and positions taken by God's kingdom, are based upon Holy Scripture, the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and the endeavor of the child of God to keep faith and a good conscience. The joy of faith, whether young or old, is in the forgiveness of sins in the name and blood of Jesus. It is precious and important to put sin away. The old Finnish speaker brother, Iisakki Poromaa, who lived from 1816 to 1904, said, "not even by the mantle of justice, behind reproach or before offense, permit sin to govern you, for it is the seed of heresy and causes divisions in the flock."

The young and old: Christian understandings

With the passing of each generation there are often associated societal changes impacting the young and old and their relationships. Times change: as we are apt to say. Some ideas and beliefs are held onto because of their timeless value or due to some tradition. Other ideas and beliefs may be cast away as old fashioned. I clearly remember a discussion about 20 years ago with a former sister who expressed the opinion to me that living Christianity was due for a 'second reformation.' She believed that she, and others, were unnecessarily bound by what were really time-honored Christian understandings which related to matters that sincere believers attempt to avoid as a matter of conscience. She was seeking support to live in the sins of this world, those especially relating to vanity and entertainment; movies, make-up, music, and the like. Sorrowfully, it was not long before she denied her faith. Luther, God's tool in the historic Reformation, reminded those in attendance at a certain church convention that they were not there to develop new understandings, but to reaffirm the 'old' scriptural truths of Christianity revealed through the Holy Spirit.

In God's kingdom our beliefs and faith don't change with the times, as the writer of the Hebrews noted, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Heb 13:8). The old testament writer, the Prophet Jeremiah, clearly explains this matter, too. He has written, "Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." (Jer. 6:16) The Psalmist also write of that same path; "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Ps. 119:105)

It is inherent in man's nature to question God's will and authority. We find that this characteristic of human nature touches each of us. The enemy of souls tempted Eve to question the Creator's will regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which was in the midst of the garden. The 3rd chapter of Genesis clearly relates this: "Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it,

neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die" (Gen 3:1-4). From the Fall in the Garden all people inherited original sin.

The Finnish pastor and poet Niilo Rauhala has recently written, "This (questioning of God's word) is nothing new, of course, but human wisdom always tends to rise above (so it wrongly reasons) the word of the Bible with different emphasis at different times. Recently, for example, there have been strong opinions to the effect that some of the biblical instructions concerning chastity are bound to time and culture and hence cannot be taken to show the line between right and wrong ways of life. Homosexuality is one of these issues. People prefer to speak (in error) about loving one's neighbor, rather than the biblical principals of ethical life."

The young and the old: Christian relationships

The Bible includes many examples of relationships. There are a great number of Christian relationships which show to us the mutual joy and understanding experienced between and among God's children who, by faith, share the love of Christ through the Holy Spirit, and through the forgiveness of sins in the name and blood of Jesus. The Holy Spirit and the gospel unite the children of God. Paul instructs, "endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." (Eph. 4:3).

The Bible also relates of some relationships which are not so good, sin being the root of malignity or ill will. King Saul, in wrath and great anger, flung his spear at David in an attempt to kill him. However, we will concentrate on the good and blessed relationships which are gifts from God. The apostle James has written, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." (James 1:17)

God has blessed his kingdom with believers of all ages. The prophet Zechariah wrote, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. and the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof." (Zech. 8:4,5)

Most fundamental to Christian relationships is the love of Christ, for in this love is found the gospel of life, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another: as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (John. 13:34-35). Also, "Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." (Eph. 6:23). This love unites the young and the old.

Paul, the apostle and an older preacher, developed a very close and precious relationship with his younger co-worker Timothy, whom he encouraged in personal faith and in the work of God kingdom, this charge I commit unto the, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; holding faith and a good conscience (1 Tim. 1: 18,19). Often, a father or mother or another older brother serve the younger ones as a trusted confessor, a sealed vessel, to whom the struggling youth may confide in to hear the gospel for freedom from accusing name sins and troublesome matters.

Naomi and Ruth, her daughter-in-law, also had a dear and close relationship, And Ruth said, entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest , I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me (Ruth 1: 16)

The Roman officer Cornelius welcomed Peter into his home to speak of the kingdom of God. Cornelius was so concerned about his personal salvation and the salvation of his family and friends, that he: "called together his kinsmen and near friends." (Acts 10:24). The marvelous result was that, "while Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell upon all them which heard the word." (Acts 10:44). Joshua took a firm stand on the foundation of his faith, and of those in his home, when he proclaimed, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (Josh. 24:15).

Clearly, these examples that we have considered show that the relationships were not at all adversarial or destructive, but quite the opposite. Relationships between all believers, and certainly between young and old, are based upon the work and love of Jesus. Paul reminded the Ephesian congregation, "now therefore ye are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone: in whom all the building fitly framed together growth unto an holy temple in the Lord, in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the spirit." (Eph. 2:19-22).

Tomm Stewart
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